

Evaluating Print Sources

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

- credibility:** the trustworthiness of a source and its information
- reliability:** the reputation of a source for providing accurate information
- currency:** how recently the information in a work was gathered
- coverage:** the amount and type of information on a topic in a source
- bias:** an opinion for or against a topic
- relevance:** the usefulness of the source to a student's research topic

HERE'S HOW

Step 1: Research each source. Find answers to questions in this chart.

Criteria	Questions	Where to Find the Answer
Reliability	Does the source have a reputation for providing accurate, up-to-date information?	back cover, for endorsements by other experts
Author and Publisher	Is the author an expert? Are credentials listed? Has the author written more on the topic? Are any reviews available? What does the publisher mainly publish?	jacket flaps, back cover, and preface; <i>Books in Print</i> or online search, for other works the publisher issues
Currency	Is the material current for the topic?	copyright page or cover
Coverage	Does the source provide an overview or an in-depth report?	table of contents, headings, index
Bias	Does the source give a balanced view? Is the author's purpose to inform, persuade, or entertain?	Search for author affiliation, political cause, or business

Step 2: Evaluate usefulness. You might try a rating system such as:

- (1) credible and central to my research;
- (2) credible but not central;
- (3) unreliable and/or irrelevant.

Step 3: Evaluate information. Ask the questions in this checklist:

Bias	Does the author say that he or she has a bias? Does the author present facts and arguments for both sides of an issue? Does the author avoid words that arouse emotions? Does the author use faulty arguments?
Accuracy	Do facts and figures come from government or university studies? Do the facts match your own expert knowledge of a subject? Do the facts and results match those of other experts in the field? Does the author document sources? If so, what types of sources?
Currency	Is the timeliness of the information important for your research? Do phrases or footnotes refer to outdated information?
Coverage	Does the material include new information or a many perspectives?